2: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1945
FE11 Tallensi FE11

FOREWORD

I

THE writing of this book has been a harder task than I anticipated when I began it in 1938. It has taught me that the hardest part of an anthropologist's work begins after he leaves the field. In the field he is engrossed in concrete human activities. It is true that he can never feel himself completely at one with the people he is studying, however gifted he may be, linguistically or psychologically. He may make some real friends among his hosts; but he can never adopt their cultural values. If he did, he would lose that detachment without which anything he wrote would be of no scientific value. All the same, he is carried by the living stream of social life. He hardly has to stop and think. Thus the crucial scientific task begins when he starts to write up his field material. It is not merely a question of putting his observations on record. Writing an anthropological monograph is itself an instrument of research, and perhaps the most significant instrument of research in the anthropologist's armoury. It involves breaking up the vivid, kaleidoscopic reality of human action, thought, and emotion which lives in the anthropologist's note-books and memory, and creating out of the pieces a coherent representation of a society, in terms of the general principles of organization and motivation that regulate behaviour in it. It is a task that cannot be done without the help of theory.

The task would be easier if social anthropology had a well-founded body of principles to which every new observation in the field could be related. This is not so; and though we all build on the shoulders of our predecessors, working out our problems with their hypotheses and findings implicitly or explicitly in mind, yet every new piece of field-work is unique in some respects, and every new monograph raises unique problems of analysis and exposition. There is inevitably, therefore, a large personal element in an anthropological monograph.

One of my difficulties lay in the complexity of the material I have tried to present. It is commonly accepted that primitive societies are much simpler than ours, both in their cultural make-up and in their social and economic structure. But even a very simple cultural heritage or social organization may be composed of a large number of strands and elements whose interrelations make up a very elaborate pattern. Simplicity in this context is much more a value concept than a scientific category. In social science it is partly a question of how closely and with what discipline one examines the data. I should have found it much easier to write this book at the end of my first tour among the Tallensi, but it would have been inaccurate in some points and defective in many. I did not know enough about the External *Boyar* cult of the Hill Talis, for example, at the end of my first tour, to understand its significance in the social structure. Indeed, this and many other matters only became clear to me in the course of writing this book.

128
114.

2: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1945
FE11 Tallensi FE11

There were extraneous difficulties too. In 1938, to quote Lord Hailey,[1] there was 'no systematic demand for research workers' in anthropology in Great Britain. Then came the war, bringing with it issues of far greater moment than the study of the social structure of a remote and unimportant African people.

The requirements of war-time publication have made it necessary to publish separately the two parts of which this study of Tale social structure consists. Though each part is self-contained, I had hoped that they could appear together in one volume. A considerable amount of compression has been necessary in order to fit the book to the Procrustean bed of austerity printing. As my concern in this book is with Tale social structure, I have preferred to leave the descriptive data pertaining to my central theme fairly full, and to compress material that can be more fully dealt with in later studies. This applies particularly to what I have written about Tale religion. It is sometimes said that anthropological monographs tend to be too long. Unfortunately, in descriptive work of this kind brevity is not always reconcilable with accuracy, however attractive it may be from the literary angle. As it is, anthropologists have to exercise rigorous selection in presenting the small fraction of their field material that it is physically possible to publish. One of the objects of any descriptive monograph must be to record material that can be used for comparative and theoretical studies. Excessive brevity (which easily lapses into facile generalization) has often proved a more serious defect, from this point of view, than an inelegant multiplicity of detail. Failing statistical devices, there is no alternative for the anthropologist who wishes to support his general statements with the evidence of observed fact, but adequate descriptive detail. I fear that I have not obeyed this rule as strictly as I should have liked to, owing to lack of space.

My object, however, has been a limited one. I have not attempted to give an 'outline' of 'the whole culture'. I consider that a work of that kind is best done in the traditional ethnographic manner of such classics as Junod's *Life of a South African Tribe* or Smith and Dale's *Ila Speaking Peoples*. It is a different thing to study those attributes of a social system that pertain to it *as a whole*, by contrast with those attributes that pertain to a limited sector of the society or a single institutional complex. Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* and Evans-Pritchard's *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic of the Azande* are examples of the latter type of study. But all studies in social structure or political organization or economic structure, being concerned with the factors of social integration, are necessarily concerned with attributes of the whole society. It is chiefly because these categories of social relations are the constant elements in all social activities and constitute the common medium through which social activities are articulated with one another that we can speak of a society as a unit, or of its different aspects as being functionally interrelated or mutually consistent. What I have tried to do in this book is to give a descriptive analysis of Tale social structure at the level of corporate

[1] Lord Hailey, 'The Role of Anthropology in Colonial Development', *Man*, xliv, 1944, No. 5; cf. also A. I. Richards, 'Practical Anthropology in the Lifetime of the International African Institute', *Africa*, xiv. 6, 1944.

2: Fortes . E-5 (1934-1937) 1945
FE11 Tallensi FE11

121 as myths that sanction or reflect contemporary social relationships and usages.[1]

In short, my chief aim has been to give a descriptive analysis of Tale social structure; but I hope that the material will also be useful for comparative and theoretical studies.

II

114 My wife and I spent nearly two and a half years in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, between January 1934 and April 1937. For most of that time we were amongst the Tallensi.[2] Our head-quarters were at Tongo, which proved to be an ideal base for our work. There we were at the hub of Taleland and within a few hours' march or ride of any part of the country we might wish to visit. We trekked over most of Taleland and also visited the chief centres of the neighbouring tribes, in particular the Mamprusi. As there is no linguistic literature for the Tallensi, we had to learn their dialect from scratch, with the assistance of a semi-literate interpreter and the scanty literature on Mole and Dagbane. It took us about six months to learn enough Talni for workaday communication with the people. By the end of our first tour we became proficient enough to dispense with an interpreter. Nevertheless, I know only too well that we reached but a moderate standard in our vocabulary and in our appreciation of the finer shades of thought and feeling that can be expressed in Talni.

We were the only white people who had ever lived among the Tallensi for any length of time and the first to speak their dialect. After their initial suspicions had been allayed, we were quickly accepted and soon had many friends. Our first informants soon got to understand our aims and entered into the spirit of our work with sincerity and zeal. They were mostly men and women who assisted us out of friendship and trust in our good faith. I wish to thank them for their confidence in us and for the devotion with which they instructed us in the way of life of their people. We remember with gratitude the patience, tolerance, tact, and friendliness of many dozens of Tale men, women, and children. They welcomed us to their homes, their domestic occasions, and their esoteric and public religious gatherings. We learnt more from them about humanity than I have the skill to write of. Tɔŋ-Yikpɛmdaan, my first friend and mentor and one of nature's gentlemen, was a fount of wisdom. The late Chief of Tongo, Na Naam Bioŋ, was a proud, intelligent, and forthright man whose support stood us in good stead and whose great store of knowledge was freely opened to us. Many others, too numerous to mention, were our faithful friends and zealous helpers.

122 My field-work among the Tallensi was made possible by the grant of a fellowship from the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures. I appreciate the privilege of having held this fellowship and record with gratitude the unfailing interest which the Directors (Dr. J. H.

[1] As Radcliffe-Brown showed in *The Andaman Islands*, and Malinowski in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*.

[2] In 1943, in the course of other duties, I had occasion to spend some time in the Northern Territories. I found that no social changes of significance had taken place among the Tallensi since 1937.

2: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1945
FE11 Tallensi FE11

Oldham and later Professor Sir Reginald Coupland) and the Secretary-General (Sir Hanns Vischer) took in the work of the Institute's fellows. I appreciate, in particular, the freedom they allowed us in carrying out the research entrusted to us and the encouragement they gave us to aim at high scientific standards. I am greatly indebted to Professor D. Westermann, who was one of the Institute's research directors. His great scholarship in West African languages and cultures made his counsel of exceptional value. The success my wife and I were able to achieve in learning Talni owed much to a short course we were fortunate enough to have with him. This, like my preliminary training at the London School of Economics, was made possible by a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation.

I chose the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast for my field-work on the advice of the late Captain R. S. Rattray. His name is written in indelible letters in the annals of West African ethnology and I was proud to follow in his footsteps. His pioneer ethnographical survey of the Northern Territories saved me months of labour.

I made Tongo our head-quarters on the advice of Administrative and other Government officers working in the Northern Territories. My wife and I owe a special debt of gratitude to the then Chief Commissioner Mr. W. J. A. (now Sir Andrew) Jones for the keen interest he took in our work and for many helpful arrangements he made to facilitate it. We have also to thank Sir Andrew and Lady Jones for many personal kindnesses. I owe my understanding of the spirit and methods of colonial administration chiefly to Sir Andrew and his officers.

My wife and I also remember gratefully the unfailing kindness and hospitality of Colonel G. H. Gibbs, M.C., Sir Andrew's successor as Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories, who was District Commissioner, Mamprusi, in 1934–7, and of Mrs. Gibbs. A visit to them was a heaven-sent rest from the strenuous routine of field-work. Many discussions with Colonel Gibbs helped to broaden my understanding of the problems of government and social development in the Northern Territories.

Captain J. L. Mothersill, Mr. E. W. Ellison, and Mr. A. F. Kerr, who were in charge of the Zuarungu district at various times during our stay there, put us greatly in their debt by their readiness to help us.

Our nearest European neighbour was Mr. C. W. Lynn, M.B.E., Superintendent of Agriculture at Zuarungu. Mr. Lynn's friendship was a great stand-by to us at all times. He was at that time engaged on his now well-known survey of native agriculture in the Zuarungu district and we had many long talks on this subject. Farming is a subject of supreme interest to the natives; and though it does not come into this book very much, I should have made little progress in the field without some knowledge of Tale agriculture. I received great help from Mr. Lynn on this side of my field-work.

I have, in this study, stuck to my last and dealt with an anthropological problem from an anthropological point of view. But I hope that what I have written will also be of service to Government officers in the Northern territories.

2: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1945
FE11 Tallensi FE11

My first teachers in anthropology were the late Professor C. G. Seligman, F.R.S., and the late Professor B. Malinowski. Both were unorthodox teachers, in different ways, and the power of their influence lay as much in the points of view as in the subject-matter they taught. An anthropologist has to be in sympathy with the people he is working amongst; but he has to view their ideas and values objectively. He can succeed in this only if he has the conviction that his work is not only immediately useful, but represents a contribution to the general body of science by which his work is nourished. Both Seligman and Malinowski had the gift of making one feel this. Seligman's catholic conception of anthropology, backed as it was by great learning, enabled him to show his pupils what a vast and exciting field of study lay open to them. I owe more to him than I can speak of here, and without his encouragement would probably never have finished this book.

My debt to Malinowski is writ large in this book. My field-work was done under the inspiration of his teaching, and I have drawn heavily on his writings and on ideas debated in his classes.

My debt to Professor A. R. Radcliffe-Brown is as great. The final draft of this book was written while I was working with him at Oxford and every significant problem in it was discussed with him. The results are obvious in every chapter. My approach to the study of social structure in primitive society is basically derived from him.

I have to thank Professor Raymond Firth for opening up many new and fruitful lines of thought to me, both in discussion and through his writings.

Dr. E. E. Evans-Pritchard has a special place in my regard. I look upon him as my older brother in anthropological studies. I have, in this book, followed where he has led. His preliminary reports on the Nuer[1] gave me the clue to the lineage system among the Tallensi. He was working on his Nuer book at the same time as I was struggling with my Tale material, and there is very little in this book that does not owe much to discussion with him.

Mrs. B. Z. Seligman, Dr. Lucy Mair, and my wife read the manuscript of this book with critical attention. I wish to thank them for this most valuable service, by which they helped me to rescue many passages from needless obscurity. My wife has not only contributed some of the field data for the book but has also materially assisted in its authorship by comment and criticism. I am very happy to be able to dedicate this book to Mrs. Seligman both as a mark of esteem from a fellow anthropologist, and as a token of friendship.

I have also to thank Miss Phyllis Puckle for secretarial assistance; Captain V. G. L. Sheddick for help with maps; Mrs. B. Wyatt for her careful editing of the book; and Dr. Alice Meinhard for compiling the index.

Lastly, there remains a friend who has to be anonymous and to whom the quotation from Arthur Waley's book is addressed. Like many people concerned with practical questions of colonial government he has doubts about the practical usefulness of anthropology and, in particular, of a

[1] Published in *Sudan Notes & Records*, xvi–xviii, 1933–5.

5: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937)1938 FE11 Tallensi FE11

former is primarily a problem of genetic psychology, the latter of cultural and sociological analysis. In studying education in a particular society we ought, ideally, to be able to take its cultural idiom for granted, whereas the first task of sociological analysis is to discover the cultural idiom. Thus, in Taleland one often finds a pair of small boys disputing with childish earnestness as to who is senior. Unless one has observed the scope of the principle of seniority in the social structure one is liable to dismiss this as mere childish play of no importance.

Education, from this point of view,[1] is an active process of learning and teaching by which individuals gradually acquire the full outfit of culturally defined and adapted behaviour. In this paper I shall try to delineate briefly how it occurs in one African society, that of the Tallensi of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast. As it will be impossible to compass the whole process of social maturation within the limits of this paper, some of the more conspicuous changes and activities only will be examined.

The sampling problem. My observations were made in the course of a field study of the Tallensi the object of which, in accordance with the usual ethnographical method, was the entire society and its culture. It is impossible in such a case—as other anthropologists have found—to follow up a special psychological problem in a manner commensurate with the criteria of experimental research in England. That will only be achieved when specialists can be induced to take over these investigations.

Such material as I am able to present consequently suffers most from sampling deficiencies. Social behaviour among primitive people appears to be more standardized than among ourselves. Yet variations occur, distributed perhaps in accordance with the normal curve of error as among ourselves but perhaps not. The problem has still to be investigated. Ethnographers are principally interested in

[1] An excursus into genetic psychology would be out of place in this paper, but the reader will observe how much it owes, *inter alia*, to F. C. Bartlett, *Remembering*; K. Koffka, *Growth of the Mind*; S. Isaacs, *Intellectual Growth of Young Children*; *Social Development of Young Children*; C. E. Spearman, *Nature of Intelligence*; and to the writings of Jean Piaget (*Language and Thought of the Young Child*, &c.). I have borrowed also from the anthropological writings already cited and from those of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, particularly from their writings on kinship.

6: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1937 FE11 Tallensi FE11

226 789 There the psychological facts are, one might say, re-created, socially transformed by the magic into a collective risk against which protection is provided by the very act which affirms its existence. The magic is concerned not with the safety of individuals but with the security of the group. Above all, responsibility for the security of the group rests, in the last resort, upon the owner of the pool, the one who brings the group into being. Through the magic this responsibility is affirmed as a privilege associated with the ownership rather than a burden. Individual magical precautions would be as incongruous with this communal situation as a particular individual's chances of injury are unpredictable. In brief, the magical organization of the situation depends upon the exploitation of psychological factors latent in it; but these psychological factors cannot be regarded as the source of the magic. Ownership, magic, and organization of the expedition constitute a unitary structure the disruption of which would entirely alter the significance of any of the constituents.

121 At the outset of this paper the view was expressed that every type of social situation exhibits a definite structure. An analysis was then made of a typical social situation met with among the Tallensi. Various institutions (chieftainship) techniques (magic) and norms of behaviour (disposal of the catch) each determined in part by a context lying beyond the boundaries of the fishing expedition, were shown to enter into the situation. It was suggested, also, that the fishing magic is the factor which binds the different components into a definite pattern. The question arises why is it that situations such as this exhibit a specific structure? Is it due to the peculiar ensemble of institutions, etc., represented? Is it due to the nuclear interest—*viz.*, the catching of fish—of the situation? Or is it due to the fact that what we differentiate as institutions, etc., appear in such situations, as the concrete responses of individuals and groups to one another in terms of social definitions and psychological impulses arising solely from the situation itself? This is a problem which requires the examination of many types of situations comprising similar combinations of institutions, techniques, and norms of behaviour.[1]

●[114] [1]This paper was written after my first expedition to the field, in 1934-5, as a Fellow of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures.